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LETTERS

A PLEA FROM ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS IN UGANDA

—Ed. note: All the letters we receive from Africa have a simplicity and immediacy that are very moving for us "sophisticated" Christians of the West. The following letter, sent in the midst of the political events which have shaken Uganda in recent months, should be especially moving to the hearts of Orthodox Christians in the free world. At the end of it are indications of how we can help.

On behalf of the Degeya Parish Council, Rev. Father Mulunga, a Parish leader, and the congregation:

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit we send our peaceful and joyful greetings to all of you brothers and give our thanks to God Who loves us and unites us into one brotherhood.

Though you live far away from Africa, yet by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the love of the Father, and the unity of our Lord Jesus, we have been put into one room, one Orthodox Church, with one Father. We feel for one another, we pray as one person. Thus we communicate our human condition with distant people, and in this relationship we ask you to join us in praising God and glorifying His Name, alleluia, for His most wonderful deed and His miracles among the nations.

Fellow churchmen, we want you to know the wonderful miracles which God has done in Uganda in this year; they ought to be known by all the churches and be written for future

history. This message may be sent to all churches in your country. In short, the story is this:

Uganda has been in a bad political situation for about eight years, under the leadership of a Sudanian minority President, Idi Amin, a man who has been mentioned on the radio around the world for his rudeness, and as the worst murderer in the world. He imposed hard laws upon the people. He interfered with the churches by changing Sunday services to Friday. He appointed Moslems to be chairmen of Synods. Bishops were to be appointed by a State body. Some churches were forbidden, and all churches were in the end to be closed. This government that was anti-church put all Christians in grave danger. He declared that Uganda is only a Moslem state. Many priests and Christians were killed; some went into exile; a few of us, poor men who had nowhere to go, with no hope of receiving help, were left in Uganda. We lifted up our hands and called on our Lord to save His poor, and to allow the work of the churches to survive. We sent so many messages around the world to pray for us and for God's work in Africa.

Through the prayers of the nations, God listened and heard the voices of his creatures, and He answered them.

In a wonderful manner, like the story we read in the Holy Bible of Moses in Egypt, God saved us. This miracle was done before us, and we

(Continued on page 177)

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Established with the blessing of His Eminence
the late *John (Maximovitch)*, Archbishop of
Western America and San Francisco, Russian
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COVER: Archbishop John Maximovitch, with Abbess Ariadna and children, taken in San Francisco not long before his death in 1966.

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ELDRESS AGATHA OF BELO-RUSSIA

Commemorated on February 5

Eldress Agatha of Belo-Russia

AND HER SERVICE TO THE CATACOMB CHURCH

by Tychon and Thekla T.

I

MATUSKA AGAFYA was the name given to the slave of God, Agatha, by the true-believing Christians, who revered her for her God-pleasing ascetic life. But before undertaking the description of this, we dare to say, blessed life, we shall briefly describe the believing people who visited her.

When the frightful, bloody October Revolution occurred in our homeland, believing people immediately sensed the anti-Christian spirit of the so-called Soviet 'authority.' Many rose up in battle against this Satanic authority. But there were also those who in fact could not enter into battle against the Bolsheviks; to such ones belonged Matushka Agatha. Being about 100 years old, she spent her nights in prayer with believers, praying to God for the salvation of Russia. She did not have any other opportunity to fight against the Bolsheviks than by the word of God. Spreading this among believing people, she taught them not to submit to the Soviet authority under any circumstances, even if they had to suffer, as subsequently happened to many. Before the Revolution she was known only by probably a few people; but during the Revolution and after it, and especially in the frightful '30's, she became widely known to the residents of the nearby regions of the place where she lived.

Those who had suffered the terrors of the Revolution and the persecution against the true Church, did not go to the so-called "Renovationist Church." It is characteristic that even the priests who did submit themselves to the Soviet government despised these uncompromising people, saying, "No matter what you do, eventually you will have to come to us."

At first the true priests — this is what Matushka Agatha called them, because they did not submit to the Soviet government — performed Divine Services in churches; but when the persecution was raised against them, they went out into the world and served secretly, fulfilling the necessary services for believing people. These priests established the Catacomb Church, whose places of worship were known only by the faithful. These priests would stop by Matushka Agatha's, and there often they would serve Divine services. This news was spread among the believers; thus Matushka Agatha became known to a large group of people who were devoted to the Catacomb Church. During their visitation of Matushka Agatha, her clairvoyance was revealed, which attracted yet more people who were seeking the true Church.

II

ELDRESS AGATHA was born in Sharylovka village, in the Gomel part of Minsk Province, which is in the western part of Holy Russia. She was born in the twenties of the 19th century. Her parents were simple peasants, very pious, and taught their only daughter to pray with fervency even from early childhood. When she was born she was paralyzed and could not get up nor walk. Her parents, when going early in the morning to work in the fields, would leave her at home. They would place her in a crib-like bed under a spreading pear tree in the garden, and themselves would go away for the whole day into the fields to till them, and she would remain there all the time alone in the garden; and the only thing she could do was pray. When the evening time would come, they would return and bring her to the house.

One day when she was twelve years old, the parents went far into the fields to work, and she lay quietly there in the garden, when all of a sudden a beautiful Lady appeared, just like in the icons of the Mother of God, and said, "Slave of God, Agatha get up!" "And I," Matushka Agatha later recalled, began to weep bitterly, and I said, 'I cannot get up, because from my early childhood I have been in a lying position. It is already twelve years that I cannot get up.' But the Lady said, 'Get up and go. Go into your house!'" "But how can I get up?" she said. Then the Lady took her by the hand and lifted her up, and at this moment her legs became firm, as if they had never been ailing. Then the Lady said to her, "Take your bedding, and bring it into your house. Go to the house, clean it up, put everything in order, until your parents come. Light the oven and fix supper for your parents. Go to the barn and feed the cattle. Having done everything, go, sit up on the stove, and quietly wait for them. But when your parents will come and ask you to join them for supper, you do not

come down; let them eat supper by themselves." Having said this, She became invisible. Agatha understood that this was the Mother of God Herself. Later Mother Agatha said that the Mother of God told her other things also, but she never revealed them.

Then she thanked God from the botton of her heart, and went for the first time on her strengthened legs to the house; she cleaned up the house, swept the floor. And when the cattle returned from the field — the sheep, the swine, the cows — then for the first time in her life, she gently stroked them. She led them in, milked the cows, strained the milk, and, having prepared supper, took out the ashes and put them in the pit, put the supper into the oven to keep it warm, and then sat quietly on the stove to wait. When the parents arrived, they saw that the cattle were not outside. Fearing that something was wrong, they quickly ran to the garden and looked under the pear tree — but there was no one there. Then they rushed into the house and they saw that their daughter was sitting quietly on the stove. They asked her, "Our dear daughter, who helped you up onto the stove?" Then she told her parents what happened, and how she fixed everything for the first time in her life. She concluded, "Go and eat the supper." The mother went to the oven, opened it, put the food on the table, and began to call the daughter to have supper with them. But the girl did not want to go down, and said that the Lady told her not to come down and eat supper with them. But the parents began to weep and lament, begging her to come down, so that they could see that she, after twelve years, could really walk. And now, moved by their plea, because of the love of her parents, she came down off the stove and quietly sat at the table. As soon as the supper was finished and they began to get up from the table, she suddenly discovered that her knees had become "glued together" (her legs were paralyzed) and she began to weep, remembering that she had not fulfilled the commandment of the Mother of God.

Thus she remained for the rest of her life. Then followed nine years of her constant cries and prayers. She would spend the whole night on her knees on the bed, crying both from pain and from sadness. And her mother learned to quiet her down by giving her a little piece of sugar, and then the girl would stop sobbing for a while. She was their only daughter. By the time she was 21 years old, she, thanks to God, could slowly move on her own strength, but had no control of her legs above her knees.

Moving slowly, she even walked twelve times on pilgrimage to the Kiev Caves Monastery, which was 125 miles from their village, on the tributary of the Dniepr, the river Sorozh. She already showed signs of a great ascetic and woman

of prayer. She lived in the garden of her parents, in a little hut which was built for her, which consisted of one room. It looked like a log cabin. But when her parents died, she remained alone and spent her life in ascetic labors and prayers. Mother Agatha told us that she was deemed worthy once more to see the Mother of God, but again she did not tell us how and when it took place. She had a gift of clairvoyance, and many people began to come to her as to an Eldress. They would gather at her place usually in order to pray to God: they would read the Psalter and sing Akathists. And after prayer, Mother Agatha would always give a teaching on the law of God.

After the death of her parents, she took in a little orphan boy, who helped her in her garden work and other errands. She brought him up, and he became a church reader in the village church. When she was younger, she herself used to walk to church to all the services without fail; but when she became older, people made her a little cart, and would pull this "wheelchair" and bring her to church, and she would sit in it during the service. They would come to her from long distances, in great numbers, and with love would bring her to church. When her church was turned into a "Living Church" after the Revolution, she stopped attending it.

The orphan boy was called Andrew. Later on he got married, built a house and lived with his own four little boys. And Matushka remained living in the house of her parents, which eventually burned to the ground. Then they built for her another cabin with the help of Andrew and one rich man by the name of Kirey, who lived on a Stolypin ranch. Her house was built right next to where the pear tree was growing. This Kirey also made for her a coffin, which was placed in her house. But this house also burned together with the coffin. Then they built for her another one, also with a coffin, and that one burned again. And then Andrew took her into his own house and the boys looked after her.

III

AT THE BEGINNING of the thirties, there remanied very few true priests, for many of them had been sent to concentration camps and placed in prisons. The ones who had not been exiled were in no position to satisfy the religious needs of all the faithful. There were cases when priests who submitted to the Soviet government during the Divine services demonstratively took off the church vestments from themselves, threw them down, and in hearing of the people renounced the priesthood and belief in God. These actions caused terror in the people, a part of which became atheists; but a part of them strove to find

the Catacomb Church; which gave instructions and indications in the true Orthodox spirit. The propaganda of atheism likewise corrupted many people. If some of them later returned to God, it was thanks to the prayers of such people as Matushka Agatha.

The believers who were thirsting for the word of God visited Matushka Agatha, begging her advice and prayers. She gave advice to all who came to her with a pure heart, but there were cases when she did not wish to receive people, and after some time it became clear that they had fallen into some sin. People who visited her received indicaions on how to act towards the Soviet authority. She would say, "My little children" (as she would call her true Orthodox visitors), "do not submit to the Soviet authority, because it is an authority not from God. Do not go into the collective farms under any pretense. Let them take away your property and rights; but do not go to them, do not sign up for them." The registration as collective farmers, who supposedly signed up 'voluntarily' for 99 years in the collective farm, she viewed as one of the forms of the seal of antichrist (99 upside down forms two digits of the "number of the beast" in Apoc. 13:18). She said that they should avoid the census — "Hide from the census of antichrist," she said; "you will get nothing from this." Especially she recommended to avoid voting, and almost everyone who visited her avoided voting and the census.

Among her numerous visitors were many family people who had children of school age. She advised parents that their children who attended school should not enter into the groups of the "Octoberites," "Pioneers," "Young Communists," and so forth. She likewise advised that their children should not take vaccinations which were periodically given to school children. This was justified by the fact that at one time children died by being infected by the vaccinations.

Concerning the Soviet church she said, "This is not a true church. It has signed a contract to serve antichrist. Do not go to it. Do not receive any Mysteries from its servants. Do not participate in prayer with them. There will come a time when churches will be opened in Russia, and the true Orthodox faith will triumph. Then people will become baptized, as at one time they were baptized under St. Vladimir. When the churches are opened for the first time, do not go to them because these will not be true churches; but when they are opened the second time, then go — these will be the true churches.* I will not

* After almost all churches in Russia were closed in the late 1930's, the churches were "opened for the first time" under Stalin (Churches of the Moscow Patriarchate); after many more closures since then, the churches have not yet been opened "the second time."

live to see this time, but many of you will live to this time. The atheist Soviet authority will vanish, and all its servants will perish." All those people to whom she spoke believe her words. Some of them are now living abroad and are awaiting the fulfillment of her prophecies, for much has already been fulfilled of what she spoke. As for what she prophecied to each one separately, all has been fulfilled.

IV

I KNEW ELDRESS AGATHA from my youth, when I lived with my parents in the village of Diatlovka, only four miles away from Mother Agatha. But in 1914 my family moved to Minsk province, which was 25 or 30 miles from Matushka. Nevertheless we village girls would join the elderly women in making pilgrimages to her on foot. Many people visited her and she received us all with love, which evoked in us a very strong feeling of reverence, contrition of heart, and often, tears of repentance. The whole atmosphere about her produced awe and fear of God.

Her little log cabin was not a large one, but it had room for many people. There was an icon corner with many icons, and large candlestands with burning candles. There were three oil lamps burning perpetually. In front of the icon corner was an analogian with the Psalter, which was read and sung often.

In appearance, Matushka was of very short stature, all white, as if made out of wax. Her eyes were light grey, full of light, and bright. She talked very slowly, softly and in a sing-song manner, at the same time slowly walking in tiny steps about her humble dwelling. Most of the time she spent in spinning flax, making yarn with her hands, while her mouth was repeating the Jesus prayer without stop. People would bring to her their home-spun linen as gifts, but she would give them away to poor people and to priests to make cassocks. Whoever would visit her, she would always make them eat dinner or supper with her, while she herself ate little. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays for her were strict fast days. She wore simple peasant clothes.

She would almost never smile, but had a gift of teaching, during which she often would make unhurried signs of the cross over herself very solemnly. Her talks were very interesting — almost all in parables, some of which were prophecies. Her gift of clairvoyance was astonishing, of which we are living witnesses. There were also cases of real miracles.

Once on the way to Matushka from Diatlovka I was walking with a

group of young women, and one of them, Melania, said that Matushka was probably illiterate and could not read, since she did not go to school; yet she knows so much from the Gospels and the Bible. When we arrived and had rested for a while, Matushka, who was sitting on her couch, said to a girl who helped her: "Motia, get me a book from the chest." She got it and gave it to Matushka. The book was a large one and in Slavonic. I sat next to Matushka on her bed, which was of hard boards. She placed the book on my lap and began pointing to various passages saying: "They say that I am illiterate, and now let us read this part and this," and she began to read aloud.

Not long before her death a certain illiterate village woman, Eugenia, paid her a visit and was standing in the back. Matushka called her and asked her to read the Psalter. The confused woman was sorry to say that she could not read because she did not know how to. Then Matushka said to her, "Take, take the book! You will open the book and read it." Eugenia took the book and, to the amazement of all, began to read for the first time in her life, and as well as if she had read for years. Truly that was a miracle.

Many priests and homeless wandering catacomb clergymen used to come to Matushka, and also many monks from closed monasteries and schema-monks who lived deep in the forests. Matushka herself would tell those who visited her about them. Evidently the whole cycle of daily services was conducted in her cell, which was a solace to those deprived of churches. They flocked to her as to a true mother in Christ. Pilgrims from holy places would bring her holy bread, which she distributed among her spiritual children in little pieces as a blessing. They would also bring to her water from the Holy Land, Jerusalem and Mt. Athos and she would share it with us. She would tell us to scoop ordinary water into little buckets at midnight and bring it to her, and she then would pour into it drops of the holy water. Thus the faithful, even those who for thirty years did not go to church, always had holy water. When the Soviet agents would come for investigation and search, as they often did, they would always see bottles with holy water, and would be curious whether it were vodka; and as a rule, not believing what they were told, just to make sure, without fail they would drink some.

In 1935-7 a schema-monk, apparently from the closed Gomel Monastery, Father Eugene, of holy life, used to appear at Matushka's for spiritual counsel, and then again would disappear. He was being sought by the authorities. When the "Living Church" of the Renovationists appeared in the 1920's, Matushka advised all not to go there, not to baptize children there, and not to have weddings there. When the infamous "collectivization" came, she said

that we should not go to the collective farms, and there were many of us who listened to her and did not go. At that time even more people began to visit her, and even people from the collective farms; she asked us not to let in such people. Then (late 1930's) there were no more Orthodox clergy left; all had been arrested and exiled, and most of them perished.

One of the very young girls who used to visit Matushka, Galka, came in one day as usual. Matushka, in front of everyone said that she had seen a dream in which Galka fell into a deep pit. Soon we found out that she had gone to the "Living Church" and joined the Renovationists and turned away from Matushka altogether.

Another time three elderly women came to Matushka, and one of them was from Diatlovka. Matushka said to them that she had seen a dream: that she was distributing bread to them, and that there was enough for one, but not enough for the other two. And it turned out that those two also went to the Renovationists.

Collectivization was bound up with absolutely inhuman treatment of the innocent peasantry, which was virtually liquidated. But just before that, in the year 1937, there was a good crop of wheat. We cut it down and stacked it, but it had to be dried a bit before being threshed. So we left it in the barn to dry, and some of us women decided to visit Matushka in the meantime, and bring her some flour. So we borrowed some flour from our neighbor Anastasia and set out. When we arrived at Matushka's and began to fix supper, she said: "No, my dear little children, we shall not eat pancakes." But we said, "We have brought some flour for you and will fry pancakes, for a good crop of wheat is stored up for us at home." But she repeated several times, "No, no, we shall not eat pancakes, no pancakes." When we came home we found out, to our great grief, that the Soviet chief of the "Selsoviet" (farmers' council) Blumkin, had taken all our wheat. And in order to pay back what we had borrowed from Anastasia, we had to work it out in her vegetable garden. So we truly did not eat any pancakes.

When absolutely no priests remained for hundreds of miles, and Pascha came, people turned to Matushka with a question: how and where can we have our kulichi and other paschal food blessed? She gave the following answer: "Go into the forest, and when it will be midnight, begin to sing, 'Thy Resurrection, O Christ Saviour . . .', 'Christ is Risen', and other paschal hymns, which are usually sung by the choir, and put the kulichi (sweet paschal bread) on the ground and let them stay there until dawn, and when the morning dew will descend upon them, then you shall know that they have been already blessed.

The Lord Himself has blessed them!" And so the faithful people did. They would gather, several families together, and spend the paschal night in the forest, because it was already dangerous to gather in houses. Later even that was dangerous, so we would put our pots with paschal food on top of the fence for the night to be blessed by God. And God blessed them and us, through the prayers of our holy Mother Agatha.

Right after the death of my five-year-old son, Eusebius, I went to Matushka with my grief, taking a handful of earth from his little grave, because he had been buried without a priest. When I came Matushka greeted me with joy as always, for she already knew of my loss. We sang the funeral service and panikhida by ourselves and went to rest for the night. In the morning, when we got up, Matushka asked me: "Have you seen your little son?" I answered negatively. "And I, my dear one, saw him," she said. "If you only knew how happy he is there, then you would beg God that the Lord would take your other sons also." The other world was indeed close to her!

Years earlier, in 1922, once when I came to her she said to me that St. Theodosius of Chernigov had visited her and said that the Communists wanted to investigate his relics, but he had risen up and come to her. Soon it became known that his relics, after being opened by the Soviet authorities, had been stolen by someone and their whereabouts since then were unknown.*

V.

MY WIFE SAW Matushka often, but I, although I wished this very much, did not have the opportunity. Then, one day Matushka sent word that she wanted to see us both. I was afraid to go because I did not have the documents. (The Soviet local police require a special permit for any departure from one's place of residence.) And then suddenly I saw a dream: two women in white garments, glittering white hair and halos around their fair heads. I could guess that one of them was Eldress Agatha, but the other Lady I did not recognize. I could only surmise that it might be either her mother or — frightful to say — the Most Holy Mother of God Herself. When I awoke I was resolved to go and finally see Eldress Agatha, in spite of the danger. So we left and on the way everything was all right. When we arrived and entered her little house, I immediately recognized Eldress Agatha from the dream I had of her. I never learned who the other holy one was.

Her dwelling consisted of a rather small one-room peasant log cabin;

* See the photograph of the opening of St. Theodosius' relics — *The Orthodox Word*, 1977, no. 72, pp. 7-11.

its walls were covered with icons and there were three icon-lamps burning; her bed was made out of a few boards put together, covered with a simple peasant mat; there were several analogions, and candlestands wtih burning candles. This is where she greeted us, sitting on her bed. There were people who looked after her. Andrew was still there.

I approached her and bowed down, as if to take her blessing, but she did not allow me to kiss her hand, and instead put it on my head, and began to kiss my head. I did not want her to do this, saying that I was a sinful man. She lifted my head and said: "Why, my dear, don't you want me to kiss your head?" Evidently she foresaw all the sufferings I would have to go through in the near future, which indeed began after 1938, when I was arrested.

We rested for a while, listened to her sweet discourse, then had supper and prayed to God together. It was good there with her, rather cozy: the heart felt touched and one wanted to weep, not from sorrow, but from 'umileniye,' that indescribable warmth from tender-feeling when the grace of God touches your heart. Putting us to bed on the floor, she asked us to lie down together under the analogion and the icons, and she herself, sitting up on her bed, prayed the Jesus Prayer throughout the whole night, calmly and regularly making the sign of the cross.

In the morning, when we got up and had prayed and had breakfast, I told her that I had a sister in Chernigov province in M. village. Then she blessed us to go and said: "Go safely, my little children, wherever you need. I shall pray to God for you." And so we travelled forty miles "illegally," saw my sister, and with God's help returned home safely. This was the last time I saw Eldress Agatha.

Eldress Agatha had many contacts with righteous men and women around our neighborhood; they themselves were real clairvoyant saints like herself. They were either her spiritual children or spiritual friends of like mind, to whom she would send our catacomb people for spiritual instruction or consolation. I liked to visit them and was at home with them, since we all had become strangers to the spirit of Antichrist that had taken hold of our once glorius and holy, but now impoverished and wretched land of Russia.

THE RIGHTEOUS WOMAN OF LOEV

In the small town of Loev on the Dniepr River there lived a holy woman who was sick for thirty years. She became paralyzed right after her marriage. For five years her husband stayed with her, but then he left her. After some time he saw that people were coming to her because she had be-

come renowned for clairvoyance, and he returned to her. Girls and pious women looked after her; she had command only of her arms. Matushka Agatha knew her and sent people to her for guidance, for she also knew how to console a grieving heart.

In 1940 my friend Athanasius S. and I decided to go to Kiev to buy some clothes. Since the steamer to Kiev stopped at this town, we decided to go on this steamer to Kiev. But when we arrived in Loev, the Dniepr in one day began to freeze, and we were afraid to go to Kiev, lest we get stranded on the way; and so we decided to abandon the trip to Kiev, and instead to pay a visit to the clairvoyant sick woman X. But we did not know where she lived, and it had already become dark.

At this very time this holy woman ordered a meal to be made for two guests, saying that two wanderers, Tychon and Ahanasius by name, were to be coming to her. Then she told her husband to go to a certain corner on the street, where he would meet two young people who were looking for her. This man met us there and asked whether we were looking for a sick woman; and when we, in great amazement, answered "yes", he brought us to her. No sooner had we opened the door than she began singing the "psalm" (religious song) that we knew well and loved, and we, with spirits uplifted from the wonderful things that God had done, joined her in singing:

"Tomorrow, tomorrow, in the house of Zacchaeus,
A mystical Guest will abide,
And speechless and pale does Zacchaeus
Now stand before Him inside.
My body — a house dark and dim
And all in disarray and unclean;
What do I have to refresh Him?
What place for my Guest unforeseen?"

Then, after praying to God, we had supper, during which some spiritual books were read aloud. Then they gave us a place to sleep. When we left in the morning she told us not to go to Kiev, but to buy everyhing in this town and quietly return to our families.

RIGHTEOUS PARAMON, THE MARTYR

In the town of Bragil there lived a 65-year-old bachelor of chaste life. His parents died early and he remained living all alone in their house for many years, leading a life of fasting and prayer. His house was not a large one, on the outskirts of town, and a large orchard surrounded it. There were two churches

in this town, and when they signed their loyalty to the Soviet Church (Metropolian Sergius), he stopped going to them and conducted the church services at home.

Once in the month of June I visited this town. I was with my other friend Athanasius (different from the above). It was Sunday morning and we were going to church. As we came closer to it, we saw that on top of the church, instead of an Orthodox cross, there was attached a hammer and sickle and a red flag. So we went to the other church, and that one had the same stamp of Antichrist on it. So we decided not to go to church at all, and instead to pay a visit to Paramon, whom we knew.

He was very happy to see us. Outwardly, he looked quite stout, of less than medium height; his head was bald and he had a medium-sized beard not yet gray. He invited us into his house, all the walls of which were thickly covered with icons; there were many icon lamps, all lit, before the holy icons. He even showed us portraits of the Tsars and the new-martyr Nicholas II. They were hidden in a large closet that had many of these old and rare portraits adorning the walls. Having examined all that he showed us, we came out into the garden. It was a luxuriant orchard, with many tall and shady trees that abounded with fruits. He somehow managed to preserve himself almost to the end from the collective farms and all the horrors and deprivaions of the hellish Soviet system, under which everything was liquidated by the Communist authority.

Here in the garden he told us of a miracle he had beheld in this very garden just over a week before. On the first of June, he suddenly saw in the air some unusually large birds, girded about with sky-blue ribbons. As he was watching them they began to hover over his garden. Suddenly he saw one of these birds come right down into his garden, and when it was almost down it asked him: "What do you see, Paramon?" Petrified, he said, "I don't know." Then it said, "We go to the East to make way for the Eastern Kings to go West." With this it rose up to join the flock and flew to the East. In a week the war broke out, and very soon the local Soviet guerillas found out about the portraits of the Tsar in Paramon's cell and about his ascetic life, and in that very garden they tortured him for a long while and then killed him. He died a martyr's death in July, 1941.

New Martyr Paramon, pray to God for us!

SCHEMA-HIEROMONK EUGENE

Many wonderful people used to visit Matushka Agatha, secret desert-dwellers from deep forests, shema-monks, and wandering homeless catacomb

clergy. One of the latter was Father Eugene, who was not native to our part of Russia. He was secretly serving in several villages. People said that he was learned, and that God revealed much to him; he gave people much useful advice.

He was tall, quite energetic, all gray-haired, and must have been 80 years old or more. He walked dressed as a priest, only sometimes he would partly hide his priestly calling by putting on some ragged village garb. When this holy Elder would appear, people would immediately know and come to him for spiritual help.

A poor village girl, by the name of Kulinka, had some kind of dangerous ailment and, trusting God more than men, wanted to do a good deed by donating beeswax for church candles. So she made a vow to give something she had, but she could find nothing but a few yards of linen towelling to bring to this holy Elder, who of course knew nothing about her vow. When she came to him, she saw many people patiently sitting and waiting in the village house where he was staying. The moment she crossed the threshold, the clairvoyant Elder turned to her and said: "Kulinka, did you bring me what you promised?" In sorrow she said that she had only the towelling, but could not get the wax. Smiling, he accepted her gift and said, "You'll get the wax some other time."

Once he stayed for two or three weeks in a village on the bank of the Dniepr, at the farmer Euthemius'. God revealed to him that the local Soviet authorities were going to deprive this poor man of all his hay, his peasant hide overcoat, his horse with bridle, and other things. So Fr. Eugene put on this coat, saying that it fit him very nicely, and that it would be good to go to visit Matushka Agatha in it. After walking around the house in it for a while he took it off and hung it back on the wall. The farmer's wife, Laksuta, began to fear that he would not give it back to her husband. Euthemius meanwhile bridled the horse in order to go to Matushka Agatha. Fr. Eugene came out and said, "Some ride we are going to have," and sitting down in the cart, pointing to a hay stack, he added, "let's sell all that hay stack and drink it! We won't need it!" But Euthemius said, "What are you saying, batushka, what are we going to live on? We will have nothing!" Then, giving a stern, sad look, the Elder said: "That's exactly how we are going to live — having nothing!" But Euthemius drove on without understanding. They visited Matushka and returned. The moment they came into the yard, the head of the "Selsoviet" arrived and took that very hide overcoat, and the hay, and the horse with the bridle. And so did all the predictions of the Elder come true. Then the poor wife bitterly regretted that they had not given the coat to Fr. Eugene.

Once my wife went with several women to see Matushka Agatha in order to hear her spiritual instructions and to pray to God together with her. Our

village was 30 miles away. When they came, after the usual greetings, Matushka turned to my wife and said with concern: "My little child, hurry up and go back. It is necessary for you to be home." My wife knew well that she was clairvoyant, and therefore she hurried home at once. Hardly had she entered the house, when the NKVD agents arrived and arrested me. We had time enough only to say goodbye, thanks to Matushka Agatha.

VI

ALL THIS TIME the Soviet authorities wanted to arrest Matushka Agatha, but they were afraid, knowing that she was clairvoyant. When she lived at Andrew's place, they arrested his wife Motia (Matrona). Then one widow from the village of Mokovo, who lived with her 14-year-old daughter, took her in; and so the Soviets arrested this widow also. Then Andrew took her back, and his boys looked after her. Then they arrested Andrew with his whole family, and exiled them. After this they came twice to arrest her, but could not.

Matushka Agatha foreknew her own death more than a year ahead: she told us about it and was prepared for it. She prepared her burial dress: it was all of a bright green color. She told us that they would starve her to death. We would say that under no conditions would we allow it, but she would say, "My little children, you will not be allowed to come to me. They will place armed guards — and I'll die." And it did occur just as she said.

What she would say to the believers concerning the Soviet authorities she would say to the Communists also. She was not afraid of them and called them "godless ones — servants of Satan." When it was reported to the NKVD agents that one old lady, by the name of Agatha, was teaching the people not to be obedient to the Soviets, calling the Soviet authority godless and of Antichrist, they sent four young NKVD agents to arrest her and bring her to the city of Gomel. When they came to her house, a terrible fear seized them, so that they hesitated to touch her. One would say to the other: "You take her;" and that one would answer, "No, you take her," and then said, "I'm afraid to touch her, because she might get glued to my hands." That was because it was known that her legs were "glued together," and so she was regarded by them as a kind of witch. She was then 119 years old. And so they could do nothing about her.

Then an order came out to starve her to death. They brought armed guards, in February, 1939, and surrounded her poor dwelling and no one was allowed to come close. The guards were there all the time, day and night, and were changed regularly. It took between two and three weeks.

Believers would come and see the dear little hut on the hilltop and knew that there a Saint of God was dying helplessly, one who had helped so many people — and they could do nothing for her. The guards were free to shoot whenever they wanted.

Then came the sad cry like the funeral knell: "Go bury Agapka," for she was no more. There was no priest. The villagers buried her in the village cemetery. We were not there when they buried her, and it was dangerous to be near. We, her people, got together in the Buritskoe village 40 miles away, and the whole night without leaving the house sang the burial service and panikhida, since there was absolutely no way to get a priest. We, girls and women, divided the whole Psalter among ourselves, one Kathisma apiece, so that the reading would continue for forty days. And so we prayed to God for her in this way, not only for forty days, but for a whole year. We do not forget our dear Matushka, who saved us and fed us with spiritual food — during the time of terrible famine.

O holy Mother Agatha, pray to God for us!

A MIRACLE OF ARCHBISHOP JOHN MAXIMOVITCH

Deliverance from Certain Death

I give witness concerning the miraculous healing of my brother, Vadim Vasilievich Kozachenko, by the prayers of our dear Vladika John. This occurred after Vladika's death, when he was reposing in his sepulchre; but he heard us and helped us as if alive.

One would like to talk a lot about Vladika. Many times while he was alive, in Shanghai and in Europe, Vladika miraculously healed the sick. In my own life the healing of Vadim is already the second miracle from Vladika. The first miracle was in 1952; I was in England, where my son Philip was born. From his birth Philip was very unhealthy, and on August 19th he became quite seriously ill. I wrote Vladika in Brussels. I received a letter from him and a leaf from a tree under which Jesus Christ had prayed; and I placed this letter under the child's pillow. He began to get better. It was notable that he became better on the very day when Vladika received my letter.

With Vadim this all occurred very unexpectedly. On Wednesday, March 15th, 1967, my brother's wife Nadia phoned me and said that my brother was dying. According to her words, "The doctor said Vadim would not live until the following Monday. Prepare mother, and come to say farewell and bury him." We did not know that he had been so seriously ill, because two weeks before this I had spoken with him on the telephone and he had assured me that he was completely well.

On the next day we went to San Francisco. When we saw Vadim we were horrified. His face was the color of tobacco, the whites of his eyes were bright yellow; he was thin, with a swollen stomach and swollen feet.

Whether he recognized us or not I don't know; I remember that everything was indifferent to him. It was difficult to believe that the doctor had sent such a dying person home. I personally called his doctor, but I could not find out anything except that if he should live until Monday he would make some kind of examination and tests. But he was very dubious that this would be necessary.

We had only one hope: the Lord and the prayers of our holy Vladika. On the same evening we phoned Father Constantine Zanevsky and asked him to come on Friday and give Communion to Vadim. Nadia and I went to church and to the sepulchre of Vladika John. After the first prayer at the tomb of Vladika the hope was aroused that Vladika would help us. Nadia felt this hope the same as I did. On Friday Vadim became worse. Father Constantine came and gave him Communion. He confessed consciously, but then again fell into unconsciousness. All our thoughts were in the prayer: "Dear Vladika, instruct and help us to do what is necessary to help Vadim. Do not leave us, dear Vladika. By your holy prayers intercede for us and help us."

Suddenly the thought came to me to take Vadim to the Veteran's Hospital. It was as though some kind of power was pushing for this: Quickly, quickly, take him to Fort Miley. Again I phoned the doctor. He almost laughed that we wanted to do this. There was no hope. Why should we bother him and take him from one place to another? Despite these refusals by the doctor, we went to church, prayed, and decided to prepare the papers to take him to Fort Miley. Nadia and I were in a terrible state, but there was a firm faith and hope that Vladika would help. Later in the evening Vadim became quite bad: he was lying unconscious, his temperature had risen, and we thought that he had pneumonia. We gathered to take him to Fort Miley, but he, recovering consciousness, begged us to take him to a private hospital, Mount Zion, and not change his doctor. Nadia and I could not decide what to do; we both wanted to take him to the Veteran's Hospital at Fort Miley. We promised Vadim to leave him in the private hospital. Again we prayed to Vladika: "Help us, dear Vladika; instruct us and help us!"

Here Leonid Michaelovich Zubrilin came to the house and insisted on taking Vadim to the Veteran's Hospital. His advice and that of my husband Rostislav were like an answer to our prayers to Vladika. Despite all the arguments of the doctor, we called an ambulance and took Vadim, who was now totally unconscious, to the Veteran's Hospital. There, towards evening, we found out that when Vadim had been taken to the Veteran's Hos-

pital he already had four diseases: cirrhosis of the liver, an overflow of bile, internal bleeding, and pneumonia. The doctor told us that Vadim was very seriously ill, and that from the medical point of view there was no hope; but if we had faith, then we should pray, because only a miracle could save him.

Vadim became yet worse. He was brought into the critical ward. He opened his eyes rarely; sometimes he was aware and would joke, but most of all he would be delirious. On Sunday after the Liturgy we had a panikhida served in the sepulchre. On this day we became acquainted with Father Mitrophan, who often serves in the sepulchre, and received a blessing from Bishop Nektary to give Unction to Vadim. News of Vadim's illness quickly spread not only in the city, but in other cities and states. Everyone was praying to our dear Vladika John. Father Mitrophan did not stop praying for Vadim. Nadia and I knew only two paths: from home to church, and from church to the hospital. But despite the fact that Vadim was very ill, our faith was growing stronger and stronger that Vladika John would save Vadim for us by his prayers. Only a short time before this Vadim had told me that when he was very ill he had often seen Vladika John and our reposed father, sometimes in a dream and sometimes when awake. He was already dying and heard some kind of special singing and music, of which he spoke in his delirium.

After receiving Unction, Vadim became better and recognized his family. Father Mitrophan gave Communion to Vadim again in the hospital. A week went by. His heart became better; this might drag on and continue. The doctor advised me to return home to Redding. After we returned, three times more we were called, and each time, according to the words of the doctor, the end was at hand; he could not hold out long. The last time they had already prepared a shirt and suit for Vadim's burial, and they had already agreed what kind of coffin to buy and where to bury him. All this was done somehow mechanically. And then a strange thing happened.

We were standing in despair at the tomb of Vladika, and I was mentally speaking with Vladika: "Dear Vladika, if this is the holy will of the Lord, help us to bear this difficult loss. Help Nadia with her two small children, and my mother. Do not leave us; help us." I had given myself entirely over to these thoughts and, as if in reply, Vladika said to me: "Are you doubting in God's mercy? Why do you not believe God? That's not the way I taught you." I was ashamed for my doubts, but also joyful because I felt that Vladika had heard our prayers. Next to me at this time stood Olga

(Continued on page 171)

The Shorter Theological Writings

OF ARCHBISHOP JOHN MAXIMOVITCH

The shorter sermons and articles of Archbishop John, no less than his major writings, are deeply theological. Whether inspiring his flock to greater piety on the Church's feast days, or commenting on the meaning of contemporary events, the source from which he draws is always the Church's theology, contained in the Holy Scripture, the Divine services, and the writings of the Holy Fathers. And his appeal to this theology is never abstract; he makes use of the Church's knowledge of God and His dealings with men only for the practical benefit of His flock: to raise their minds above worldly concerns, to inspire them with the ideals of self-sacrifice and struggle, to assure them of the victory of faith and righteousness over unbelief and lawlessness.

The following sermon was delivered by him thirty years ago as an answer to contemporary godlessness.

A Hymn to God

BY ARCHBISHOP JOHN MAXIMOVITCH

"O Thou Who art above all things! For what besides this am I allowed to utter concerning Thee? How can words hymn Thee?—for Thou canst not be expressed by any words. How can the mind behold Thee?—for Thou art inaccessible to any mind. Thou alone art unutterable, because Thou hast brought forth all things that can be uttered in words! Thou alone art unknowable, for Thou hast brought forth all that can be embraced by thought. All things, both rational and irrational, give Thee honor. The common desires of all are directed towards Thee; all hearts are pained for Thy sake; all things send up entreaty to Thee; to Thee all things that understand Thy bechkonings utter a silent hymn of praise. By Thee alone do all things exist. All things strive together towards Thee. Thou art the end of all things; Thou art single and all; Thou art neither single, nor solitary, nor all. O Thou Who art named by all names! What shall I name Thee, the single unnameable! And what heavenly mind can penetrate the veils beyond the clouds? Be merciful, O Thou Who art above all things! For what besides this am I allowed to utter concerning Thee?"

St. Gregory the Theologian

The fool hath said in his heart: There is no God.
Psalm 13:1

The Prophet David, long before the Incarnation of Christ, clearly showed the reason why men strive to convince themselves that there is no God: *Thy are corrupt and are abominable in iniquities* (Ps. 52:2)

Moral corruption forces men to tremble before the future judgment; the conscience accuses them of sins. But men wish to sooth themselves, to

stifle the conscience. They convince themselves that "there is no God." What else can one call such a self-soothing but foolishness?

Whether we acknowledge that God exists or deny it—still *He exists.* He ceaselessly declares concerning Himself through the book written by His finger: nature. *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament proclaimeth the work of His hands* (Ps. 18:1).

"I asked the luminaries of heaven," says one church writer: "Are you God? And they answered: No. I asked the air: Are you God? And it answered: No. I asked the forests and groves: Are you not God? And they answered: No. And then all things together cried out unanimously in a loud voice: No, we are not God, but we were created by Him!"

The whole of nature submits to the Creator and His laws. Only the crown of His creation, tempted by the fallen angel—the devil—rises up against Him.

This is nothing new. Soon after the Fall (of Adam) men began to turn away from God. But an inward voice demands the acknowledgement of a higher power. Those who do not desire to revere the true God only create false gods for themselves. The more corrupt the heart is, the more repulsive and vile is the god men worship.

But here the chief passion of man steps forth; pride, a pride that demands of man that he submit to nothing higher. A battle begins against every religion; men strive to convince, first of all, themselves that "there is no God," there is nothing above them. The awareness of their wrongness inspires them to a battle against faith, a battle against religion—to a war against God Himself.

However, the very intensity of this battle only confirms what they deny! *If there is really no God, then why is there a battle? Do men really fight against what doesn't exist?!*

An inward voice says to the militant godless that they are lying to themselves, and this voice they strive to stifle with evil deeds.

But all the same, even they cannot remain without a god.

The godless at the time of the Prophet Daniel made the king their god, demanding that men turn only to him and the idol erected by him.

The godless in the French Revolution compelled men to worship reason.

The godless of our times have already almost raised up Lenin to be a god: the talks and articles of their leader take the place of Holy Scripture for them, and faith in the Socialist paradise takes the place of the eternal Kingdom of Christ.

A new faith is being built: faith in the non-existence of God.

In order to strengthen faith in atheism, *the counsel of the ungodly* (Ps. 1:1)* is now gathering together. The teachers of the new faith and their disciples gather together *against the Lord, and against His Christ* (Ps. 2:2). They address mankind with an appeal to overthrow submission to God, to throw off His yoke from themselves.

He that dwelleth in the heavens shall laugh them to scorn, and the Lord shall deride them (Ps. 2:4).

In earlier times the Lord allowed the Egyptian Pharaoh to rise against Him, and Sennacherib, who mocked God, to utter blasphemous speeches.

But the more the Lord allows, the more frightful is the ruin of the impious! *In a moment they have ceased to be; they have perished because of their iniquity* (Ps. 72:19).

Now also the hour of the Lord's judgment will come, when the Lord *shall speak unto them in His wrath, and in His anger shall He trouble* the obstinate (Ps. 2:5), and those who are wavering in heart will clearly see the power of God and will have to cry out, like Nebuchadnezzar: *Thy Kingdom is an eternal Kingdom, and Thy dominion is from generation to generation* (Daniel 3:3²).

Shanghai

January 25, 1937
Commemoration of St. Gregory
the Theologian

* "Counsel" or "council" (*soviet*) has also a specific political meaning in contemporary Russia, which may be seen if this phrase is rendered as "the Soviet of the ungodly."

DELIVERANCE FROM CERTAIN DEATH

(Continued from page 166)

Nikolaevna Zubrilina. She was likewise praying for Vadim. I turned to her and already with joyful tears I told her what had gone on in my mind. She told me: "Valechka, our Vladika is a saint. He has heard our prayers. Believe me, dear one, Vadim will get better." From this day on there were no more doubts: Vadim would get better, although the doctors continued to assure us that there was no hope, and only a miracle would save him. Yes, we know; but we believe in miracles, and by a miracle of our Vladika, Vadim would become well.

After this Vadim became very ill twice more. Again he was placed in the ward for the critically ill. Nadia phoned me and said that the doctor was absolutely trying to persuade her to go straight to the morgue and begin preparations for the burial. But at this time she had such faith in his recovery that she advised us not to come, saying that she did not believe the doctor. I immediately phoned the Zubrilins and asked them to go to Father Mitrophan, so that he might give Communion to Vadim once more. When Father Mitrophan came to the hospital, the doctor said that they were expecting his death any minute. Glory be to God, by the prayers of Vladika John death passed by, and from that day Vadim began to get better.

Soon Pascha came, and it was a joyful one. Vadim was terribly thin; he was only skin and bones and had grown much older, but still he looked better. He was allowed then to eat everything. He began to speak sensibly, and then did he begin to undersand what had happened to him. The physicians were astonished. How could such a sick man get better? After all, for a whole month he had lain unconscious, although there had been moments when he did recognize things. His wife had been called four times from work because death was near. Truly this was a miracle. The physicians said: "We did what we could, but it was God who has given you life." He got better all the time. His liver was totally restored, and he was recovering quickly.

At the beginning of June, the day finally came when the physicians decided to let him go home. He was placed on a very strict diet. The doctors told his wife that he would never be able to work again. Despite the fact that he had gotten better, his stomach was still very swollen; there was much water, and therefore the danger had not passed away, and the illness might return, or he might get sick to death again. Nadia, I, and all the other members of the family did not worry very much over this because we believed

that everything would be all right. Days, weeks, and months passed by and his stomach was still swollen and there were no signs that it would go down.

Returning home to Redding from one of my trips, I was very much suffering for Nadia, for I had noticed that she had begun to become discouraged. As always, my thoughts went to Vladika John. Before my return to Redding, I had gone to the cathedral to pray at Vladika's tomb. I so much wanted to see him, to hear his voice, to speak with him. At home on this very evening, my thoughts again returned to my scik brother. I remembered Shanghai and how in difficult moments I would run to the cathedral to Vladika to share with him my sorrows or my joy. "If you were with us, dear Vladika," I thought, "if you would place your hands on his sick body, I believe that you would get rid of this swelling and this water, just as our Lord Jesus Christ banished the unclean spirits." And here—I say this honestly with my whole soul and heart—I do not know whether I fell asleep or was half awake: I saw Vladika John come into my bedroom dressed in a gray cassock with a black belt. He had his prayer rope in his hand, and on his head a small kamilavka. Entering the room, he turned to me and said, "Well, what kind of misfortune do you have now, that you are grieving so?" From my childhood Vladika always had a mocking tone with me, as a grownup would have with children. So it was now, but his eyes were full of love, and there was a smile on his lips. Here we were both near the bed on which the sleeping Vadim was lying. He went up to the bed and, not looking at me, he asked, "What's wrong here?" I told Vladika that Vadim had a swollen stomach and that there was much liquid in his stomach, and began to explain to him, saying: "If you would place your hands on Vadim, I know that you would deliver him from swelling and liquid and all the other filth he has in his organism."

Vladika bent down over Vadim, placed his hands on his shoulders, and began to pray; I felt that there was no need for me to say any more. Vladika prayed. I know that my eyes followed every one of his movements. Vadim lay on his back, his hands stretched out at his sides. Vladika with his hands encircled and moved down his body as if he were chasing out all the filth and impurity, all the poison, not only from his stomach, but from his whole body. With each movement I felt that I was witnessing a miracle, that from this moment Vadim would begin to get well. Vladika finished, took his hands from the feet of Vadim, straightened himself out, and then vanished. I did not manage to say a word to express to him my gratitude; Vladika was no longer there. I wished to run after him, and at this moment I saw that I was in my room in Redding. I got up from my bed and put out

the light. I stood on my knees and prayed with tears of gratitude to the Lord God, and thanked our dear intercessor and man of prayer. In my soul was peace and tender feeling.

When I phoned Nadia, she informed me that they had noticed a change, that is, Vadim's stomach had become smaller. Gradually it began to go down. The physicians were very much encouraged and again repeated, "A miracle, a miracle!" With every day Vadim became stronger and better. The day finally came when he was allowed to eat everything he wanted, first a little at a time, then normally. He grew strong; his appetite was good. The swelling and liquid went away as if they had never been. They took Vadim off his medicines and allowed him to return to work. Nadia and Vadim had a panikhida served at Vladika's tomb, and likewise a moleben of thanksgiving. Then they went to the hospital to thank all the physicians who had treated him. All of them as one told him: "Don't thank us; someone 'up there' loves you very much." Yes, I know that our dear Vladika loves and protects us, as always he has protected all of his spiritual children.

All of the people mentioned here are ready to affirm the truth of the description of this miracle by the prayers of Archbishop John.

Valentina V. Harvey
October 10, 1968
Redding, California*

* Translated from the Russian text in *The Chronicle of the Veneration of Archbishop John Maximovitch,* St. Herman Brotherhood, Platina, CA, 1976, pp. 171-178. Vadim Kozachenko *is still alive and healthy* as this is being printed (1979).

VITA PATRUM

THE LIFE OF THE FATHERS

By Saint Gregory of Tours

CHAPTER FIVE

Saint Portianus the Abbot

EARTHLY SLAVE WHO INHERITED
THE HEAVENLY KINGDOM

WHAT GOOD THINGS Almighty God grants in His name to those who faithfully consecrated themselves to His service in good works! He promises them great rewards in heaven, but often, too, He lets them know in this life what they will receive. For often He sets slaves free and makes those who are free glorious, as was said by the Psalm-writer: *Who raised up the poor man from the earth, and from the dunghill lifted up the pauper, that He may seat him with the princes of His people* (Ps. 112: 6-7). About this, Hannah the wife of Elkanah said, *They that before were full have hired out themselves for bread, and they that were hungry have ceased to hunger* (I Sam. 2:5—I Kings in the *Septuagint*). And concerning this the Virgin Mary, the very Mother of our Redeemer, said, *He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree* (Luke 1:52). And the Lord Himself said in the Gospel: *The last shall be first and the first last* (Matt. 20:16). Thus, may the Divine mercy shine forth with His love upon the poor, so that it may make great ones from the little, and that from the weak it may make co-inheritors with His Only-begotten Son. For it exalts the poverty of this world to heaven, to which the earthly kingdom cannot rise, so that the rustic comes to the place where he who wears the purple does not merit to come.

Such was the case with the blessed abbot Portianus, whom the Lord not only freed from the burden of worldly bondage, but whom He also glorified with great virtues and whom He established in eternal repose after the affairs and afflictions of this life, placing him among the choirs of angels, from which the prince of this world was expelled.

SAINT PORTIANUS THE ABBOT

1. The most blessed Portianus, then, from the beginning of his life, always sought after the God of Heaven, even in earthly servitude. And in fact, they say that he was the slave of a certain barbarian, and that several times he took refuge in a monastery so that the abbot might stand on his behalf before his master. In the end he took to flight; his master followed in his track and began assailing the abbot of the monastery, accusing him of enticing his servant and withdrawing him from his service. And when, according to custom, he pressed the abbot with accusation to give him back, the abbot said to Portianus: "What do you want me to do?" "Have me pardoned," he replied.

When he was pardoned and his master wished to take him back to the house, he became so blind that he was no longer able to recognize anything. Feeling himself to be afflicted by great pains, he called the abbot and said, "I beg you, entreat the Lord for me, and take this servant for your own service; perhaps I shall regain the light I have lost." Then the abbot called the blessed one and said, "Lay your hands, I beg you, on that man's eyes." And when he refused, the abbot so begged him that he made the sign of the Cross over his master's eyes, and immediately all darkness was dissipated and the pain was eased, and he was returned to his former health.

Thereafter the blessed Portianus was made a cleric, and he displayed such virtue that when the abbot died he succeeded him. It is said of him that during the summer, when the sun's brightness sapped the strength of all by the power of its heat, and even fatigued the bodies of those who from food and drink were more robust, Portianus, who as a result of fasting no longer had moisture in his mouth, would chew salt, which would moisten his parched gums for a little while. And, although he moistened his dry palate by this, nevertheless he added to his bodily torment by increasing his thirst. For as everyone knows, salt increases the burning of thirst rather than extinguishes it; but, by God's gift, he was delivered from it.

2. In those days Theoderic came into the territory of Auvergne and was destroying and ravaging everything. When he had encamped in the fields of the village of Arthone, the blessed Portianus, an old man, hastened to come before him in order to intercede for the people. And coming into the camp in the morning, while the king was still sleeping in his tent, he went to the tent of Sigivald, who was Theoderic's aide-de-camp. And when he pleaded for the release of the captives, Sigivald implored him to wash his hands and take some wine with him, saying, "The Divine mercy will have granted me today a great joy and benefit, if having entered my tent you will deign to drink my wine after praying." For he had heard of that man's

holiness, and that is why, out of respect for God, he had shown him this honor. But the Saint excused himself in various ways and said that this could not be, because the proper hour for eating had not come, because he had not presented himself before the king's majesty, and, most importantly, because he had not yet chanted the Psalms he owed to the Lord. But Sigivald, disregarding all that, constrained him, and when a cup was brought, he bade the Saint to bless it first with his hand. When he raised his hand to make the sign of the Cross, the cup broke down the middle and the wine spilled on the ground together with a huge snake. Those who were present were filled with fear and cast themselves at the blessed man's feet, licking his footsteps and kissing his feet. All wondered at the old man's virtue; all marvelled at having been divinely preserved from the venom of the serpent. The whole army ran to see such a miracle, and the whole crowd of them surrounded the blessed man, each one wishing only to touch with his hand the fringes of his garment, if he could not honor him with a kiss. The king leapt from his bed and ran to the blessed confessor, and, without waiting for him to say a word, freed all the captives he had asked for and all the others he might wish thereafter. Thus, by the grace of God, he received a double benefit, rescuing some from death and others from the yoke of bondage. Truly, I believe, and it is my faith, that in a manner of speaking he brought back from the dead those who were saved from danger.

3. I do not wish to pass over how the devil, trying to deceive him by various machinations, but seeing he could not harm him, marched against him in open combat. Thus, one night, when he was sleeping, suddenly he awoke and saw his cell as if it were all on fire. Rising in fright, he sought the door. Not being able to open it, he prostrated himself in prayer; then when he had made before and around him the saving sign (of the Cross), the phantom flames which had appeared immediately vanished, and he knew that this was a deception of the devil. This was immediately revealed to the blessed Protasius, who was then a recluse in the monastery of Canbidobrense and who sent in all haste a monk from his cell to his brother in order to exhort him and to say, "You must, most beloved brother, manfully resist the devil's attacks and fear nothing of his knavery, but overcome all he sends against you with continual prayer and the sign of the Cross, because he always tries to conquer God's servants with temptations of this kind."

The blessed man grew old, and having fulfilled his course of good works, he departed to the Lord. His tomb is still glorified often with Divine power. This much we know of the holy man, but we do not judge those who know more about him, if they wish to write something in his praise.

SAINT PORTIANUS THE ABBOT

NOTES

Saint Portianus (*Saint-Pourcain* in French) died about 527 and is commemorated on November 24.

The Monastery of Saint Portianus formed the beginning of the town of Saint-Pourcain, about forty miles north of Clermont. The monastery survived until the French Revolution; the Romanesque church of the Holy Cross is all that remains of the monastery today.

The incident when the blessed hermit Protasius (also commemorated on November 24) sent word of exhortation to St. Portianus concerning the deceptions of the devil recalls an incident in the 14th-century life of St. Paul of Obnora, when his spiritual father, St. Sergius of Nurma, told him that the seeming destruction of his cell was not a reality, but only a deceptive phantom of the demons (see *The Northern Thebaid,* St. Herman Brotherhood, 1975, p. 40).

LETTERS *Continued*

got peace, freedom in worship and prayer. Please, nations, join and coordinate your prayers with us.

God brought the force of President Nyerere from another State (Tanzania); He gave him the strongest armies, and they came down into Uganda and dismissed the anti-church President. This was done, and Amin was cast out of Uganda. We are now free and have peace and freedom of worship. We ask all the Churches to praise Him and send this message everywhere.

Dear brothers: through the war of liberation many churches, schools, and houses were bombed. Many people were killed; there are so many widows; we are without schools and helpless. Our people are in need of food, milk, blankets, shirts, coats, shoes, plates, books, icons, and so forth.

We then call on all good Christians to open their hands and give support to the poor; also, the Degeya Parish Council is applying for your church magazines. Thank you.

May peace and love survive among all the Orthodox Churches.

Yours,

Azaria Mwanja, Chairman
Efcusi Nakillo, Secretary
Rev. Fr. Emmanuel Mulunga,
Parish Priest

Address:
The Transfiguration Orthodox Church
P.O. Box 238, Bombo
Degeya, Uganda

The Banishment and Repentance of Adam and Every Christian

HOMILY 66

SAINT SYMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN

1. CONCERNING THE BANISHMENT OF ADAM FROM PARADISE, AND THAT IF HE HAD REPENTED AFTER TRANSGRESSING THE COMMANDMENT OF GOD, HE WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN BANISHED FROM PARADISE.

GOD IN THE BEGINNING created man as the king of everything earthly, and not only of everything earthly, but of everything under the vault of heaven; for the sun also and the moon and the stars were created for man. And so, being king of all this visible world, did man endure from this any kind of harm for his virtue? No, he did not. On the contrary, if he had always given thanks for this to God Who had created him, and had dedicated all of this to Him, he would have advanced yet more in virtues. And if he had not transgressed the commandment of God, of course, he would not have lost the kingdom which he had, and he would not have fallen away from the glory of God. But since he transgressed the commandment of God, he was justly banished from paradise and began to live in labors and cares, and died in banishment.

And now listen, and I will tell you something which no one has yet expressed with complete clarity. The Divine Scripture says: *God said to Adam. Adam, where art thou?* (Gen. 3:9.) Why did the Creator of all things say this? Of course, it was in order to dispose Adam to come to his senses, to acknowledge his sin and repent. This is why He said, "Adam, where art thou?' As it were he said, "Adam, enter into yourself, acknowledge your nakedness and understand what a garment and what glory you have lost. Adam, where are you?" In a certain way, as it were, He awakens him and says: "O Adam, come to yourself and confess with humility your sin. Come out of the place where you are hiding. Do you think to hide yourself from Me? Say: 'I have sinned.'"

But he did not say this (or rather, I the wretched one do not say this, because this is my own passion). But what did he say? *I heard the sound of Thee walking in paradise, and I was afraid, because I am naked; and I hid myself* (Gen. 3:10). And what did God then say to him? *Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree of which I commanded thee not to eat of it alone?* Do you see, beloved, the compassion of God? When God said to Adam: *Where art thou?* and Adam did not confess his sin, but said, *I heard the sound of Thee walking in paradise, and I was afraid, because I am naked; and I hid myself* — He did not become angry at him immediately and did not turn away from him, but again asked him, saying, *Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree of which I commanded thee not to eat of it alone?*

Do you understand the depth of God's wisdom? When Adam said, "I am naked," God said to him: "Why do you say that you are naked, and hide your sin? Do not think that I see only your body, but do not see your heart and your thoughts." For Adam was deceived and truly thought that God did not know about his sin, saying to himself as it were: "I will say that I am naked. God, not knowing the reason for this, will ask, 'How did you become naked?' And I will reply to him, 'I do not know.' Thus I will deceive Him and again receive my previous covering. And even if I do not receive this, at least He will not banish me now from paradise and will not send me to a different place." This is what Adam thought, as now also many people think — and first of all I myself — when we hide our sins.

But God, not desiring that the sin of Adam should be weighed down by this unawareness, said to him: "How did you know that you were naked, if you did not eat of the tree of which it was forbidden to eat?" He, as it were, said to him: "Do you think to hide yourself from me? Do you think I do not know what you have done? Why do you not say: 'I have sinned?' Say O miserable one: 'Yea, O Master, in truth I have sinned, transgressing Thy commandment; I have obeyed the counsel of my wife and have committed a great sin, acting according to her word and transgressing your own word. Have mercy on me, O God, and forgive me.' "

But he did not say this, did not humble himself, did not become contrite. His heart was hardened, just as mine is, the wretched one. But if he had said this, he would have remained in paradise and would not have been subjected to those deprivations which he later experienced. By this one phrase, 'I have sinned,' he would have redeemed all the multitude of years which he spent in hell.

Here is what I have promised you to say! But listen a little longer, and you will understand how true my words are. God said to Adam: *In the day that thou eatest of it* (that is, of the forbidden tree) *thou wilt die the death* (Gen. 2:17) — that is the death of the soul. This happened immediately: Man was stripped of the garment of immortality; God said nothing more than that decree, nor did anything special happen after that. God, forseeing that Adam was to sin, and desiring to forgive him if he repented, did not say anything more than the above. But Adam refused to acknowledge his sin and did not repent even when he was accused by God; for he said, *The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me* — she deceived me (Gen. 3:12).

O woe to his blinded soul! Saying this, he as it were said to God: Thou Thyself art guilty, because the woman whom Thou gavest me hast deceived me." This very same thing I myself now suffer, wretched and miserable, when I do not desire to be humbled, and to say with my whole soul that I myself am guilty of my perdition. But on the contrary I say: "That person over there inspired me to do or say this. He advised me and knocked me off the path." Woe to my poor soul which speaks such words filled with sin! O most shameless and irrational words of a shameless and irrational soul!

And after Adam had said this, God said to him, *In the sweat of thy face thou shalt eat bread, till thou returnest to the earth, for out of it thou wast taken. For dust thou art, and to the dustshalt thou return* (Gen. 3:19). As it were he said to him: "I told you to repent in order to remain in your previous condition, but since you are hard of heart and unrepentant, therefore depart from Me. This your departure from Me will be a sufficient chastisement for you; you are dust, and to the dust you will return." Do you understand now that Adam, because he did not repent and did not say "I have sinned," was banished from paradise, condemned to lead a life in labors and sweat, and to return to the earth from which he was taken?

Then, leaving him, God went up to Eve, desiring to reveal whether she should be justly condemned with Adam to banishment because she did not wish to repent. And He said to her: "What is this you have done?" — so that at least she might say, "I have sinned." For what other reason did God say to her such words unless to inspire her to say, "O Master, it was from my lack of understanding that I did this, poor and miserable as I am, and disobeyed Thee, my Lord. Have mercy on me and forgive me!" However, she did not say this, but what did she say? *The serpent beguiled me (Gen. 3:13). O stony insensitivity!* You also, Eve, after you agreed to converse with the serpent, who spoke to you words which were against your Master and God, preferred him to God your

Creator. You found his counsel better than the commandments of your Lord, and considered it truer than the commandment of God. And you do not acknowledge that you did badly, and you do not repent?! Thus, inasmuch as she also did not wish to say, "I have sinned," therefore she also was banished from the paradise of delight and removed from God.

Penetrate to the depth of the mysteries of the man-loving God, and know from this that if they had repented, they would not have been banished from paradise and condemned to return to the earth from which they had been taken. How this may be, now listen.

2. WHAT GOOD WAS BROUGHT TO ADAM BY REPENTANCE, AND WHAT REPENTANCE DID HE OFFER IN BANISHMENT?

Being banished from paradise, they immediately began to thirst and hunger, to freeze and shiver, to have labors and sweat, and to endure all those difficulties and griefs which we even now endure. Therefore, they soon felt into what a bitter condition they had descended, and to what a great misfortune they had become subject. Then they realized both their own hardness of heart and their lack of repentance, as well as God's unutterable condescension and compassion towards them. Therefore, even walking and sitting outside paradise, they repented and shed tears, beat themselves in the face and tore out the hairs of their head, lamenting over their former hardness of heart. And this they did not for one day or two, or for ten days, but for their whole lifetime. For how can one not weep, remembering their meek and condescending Master, that unutterable delight of paradise, those indescribable good things and beauties of the flowers of paradise, that carefree life without labor, and that communion with angels? In wordly life, when servants are appointed by an eminent master in order to serve him, as long as they preserve attention, respect, and obedience towards their lord they have boldness before him, enjoy his favor and love, and live with him in peace and satisfaction. But when they become proud and begin to step away from the will of their master and despise their fellow servants, they lose not only their boldness before him, but even his favor and love; and at his order they are banished into a far country where they are subjected to innumerable necessities and sorrows, and the more they suffer and are in misfortunes, the more they feel the bitterness of their condition, remembering the peaceful and satisfied life which they have lost. This same thing was experienced by our first ancestors also, who lived in paradise and took sweet delight in its great good things. They acknowledged the greatness and value of these good

things after they had lost them, being banished from paradise; then they recognized also the whole greatness of the evil which they had done. Therefore they ceaselessly grieved and wept, calling on God's compassion.

And what did God do, being quick and ready to mercy, and slow to punishment? He foresaw that they would finally become humbled and repent, and therefore He foreordained a special means for abolishing His righteous sentence upon them. But He did not immediately bring into execution this foreordained decree, but assigned for this His own place and time and fashion, so as to teach us to love wisdom and not to rise up against our Creator and God. Just as He foreordained, so later did He do: for those whom He had banished from paradise for their brazenness before Him and their unrepentant heart, since they had humbled themselves and wept over themselves, He arranged a way for the restoration of what had been lost. And this is what it was: The Only-begotten Son and Word of the Unoriginate Father descended from the heavens to earth, and not only became man like them, but even was pleased to endure a violent and shameful death; then He descended into hell, brought them up from there and restored them. And thus, since Christ so suffered for them, as you hear every day, that He returned them from such a distant exile, would He not have had pity on them if they had repented then in paradise? How could He not have had pity on them, when He by nature is the Lover of mankind and compassionate, and He created them in order that they might take sweet delight of the good things of paradise and might glorify their Benefactor?

But so that you might the better understand this and believe my words, hear yet more: If they had repented then, when they were still in paradise, they would have received again only paradise and nothing more. But inasmuch as, being banished from paradise for their lack of repentance, they then repented, wept much and were in great misfortunes, therefore God the Master of all, for their labors and sweat, for the misfortunes which they endured and for their good repentance, was pleased again to honor them and to glorify them so as to cause them to forget the whole evil which they had caused.

And what did He do? Behold how great is God's Love of mankind! Descending to hell and bringing them out, He did not bring them again into the same paradise from which they had been banished, but He raised them up to the heaven of heavens; and when He sat down at the right hand of His God and Father, He sat them down together with Him. Just think what great honor He gave to Adam who by nature was His slave, and vouchsafed him to be God's own father according to His grace-given dispensation. See to what a height

our Master Christ raised him up for his repentance, humility, lamentation and tears! O the power of repentance and tears! O the ocean of Love of mankind which is beyond words, and mercy which cannot be traced out!

3. IF ONE TRULY WISHES TO REPENT, HE MUST REPENT

And not only Adam did God honor and glorify, but also us his sons — those, that is, who have begun to please him by repentance, tears, lamentation and by all of which we have spoken; and even up to now He glorifies and honors like Adam those who repent well and do what Adam did. Further, those who up until now and in the future will do this and repent, whether they be laymen or monks, He will glorify like Adam, as He Himself, our true God, has said: "Truly I say to you, I will not leave them ever, but show them to be My brethren and friends, fathers and mothers, kinsmen and coinheritors. I have glorified them and will glorify them, both in the heavens on high and on the earth below; and of their life and rejoicing and glory there shall be no end."

Tell me, then, my brother: What profit was there for our first ancestors in that laborless and carefee life which they had in paradise, when they were careless, disdained God by not believing Him, and transgressed His commandment? For if they had believed Him, Eve would not have considered the serpent to be more trustworthy than God, Adam would not have believed Eve rather than God, and they would have refrained from eating of the forbidden tree. But they ate and did not repent, and for this they were banished from paradise.

Moreover, from banishment also they received no harm, but great benefit. This is by power of the dispensation of our salvation. For our Master Christ descended from the heavens, by His death loosed the bonds of our death, and took away the condemnation which came down to us from the transgression of our first parents; by the power of holy Baptism He regenerated us, recreated us and delivered us from every condemnation and made us in this world completely free, so that our enemy the devil might no longer act in us and against us by violence and force. He honored us with the same autonomy which was given us in the beginning, and He gave us more power against the enemy, so that those who desire might easily conquer him, than all the saints had who lived before the dispensation of Christ. And when such ones die they do not descend to hell like the ancients, but ascend to the heavens and are vouchsafed to receive the repose and eternal joy which are there — only to a certain degree at the present time, but completely and entirely after the resurrection.

And so let no one invent excuses for his sins and say that we, by virtue of the transgression of Adam, are entirely subject to the action of the devil and are dragged by force into sin. They who think and speak thus consider that the dispensation of the Incarnation of our Master and Saviour Jesus Christ was useless and in vain. Such an opinion is the opinion of heretics and not of the Orthodox. For what other reason did Christ descend and become incarnate, and for what else did He suffer if not in order to loose the condemnation which proceeded from sin, and to deliver our race from slavery to the devil and from the activity in us of this our enemy? This is true autonomy: in no way to be subject to someone else. We are all born sinners from our forefather Adam who sinned; we are all criminals from a criminal, slaves of sin from a slave of sin, subject to the curse and death from him who was subject to the curse and death. And because of Adam who received the action of the cunning devil, and by his counsel was moved to sin, and enslaved himself to him and lost his autonomy — we also, as his children, are subject to the action and the compulsory dominion of the devil and are his slaves. But our Lord came down from the heavens, was incarnate and became man like us in everything except sin, in order to annihilate sin. He was conceived and born so as to sanctify the conception and birth of men. He was raised up and grew little by little so as to bless every age of life. He began to preach at the age of thirty, having become a full-grown man, so as to teach us not to jump out of line and go before those who are greater than us in mind and virtue, that is, are more intelligent and virtuous than we, especialy if we are still young and not perfect in understanding and virtue. He preserved all the commandments of His God and Father so as to loose every transgression and to deliver us criminals from condemnation. He became a slave, took the form of a slave, in order to raise us, the slaves of the devil, once more into the condition of masters and to make us masters and possessors over the devil himself, our former tyrant. (This is confirmed by the saints who have cast out the devil, as a weak and infirm one, as well as his servants, not only in their lifetime but also after their death.) He was hung upon a cross and became a curse, as the prophet says: *Cursed is everyone that hangeth upon a tree* (Deut. 21:23), in order to loose the whole curse of Adam. He died in order to put death to death, and He rose in order to annihilate the power and activity of the devil who had authority over us by means of death and sin.

Thus our Lord, having cast into the midst of the death-dealing poison of sin the unutterable and life-giving activity of His Divinity and His Flesh, has liberated our race from the working of the devil; and purifying us by holy Baptism and bringing us to life by the communion of the most pure Mysteries of

His precious Body and Blood, He makes us holy and sinless. But He then leaves us again to have autonomy, so that it might not seem that we serve our Master by compulsion, but rather by our own free will. Therefore, as in the beginning Adam in paradise was free and sinless, and by his free will obeyed the enemy, was deceived and transgressed the commandment of God — so on the contrary we, being regenerated by holy Baptism, delivered from slavery and becoming free, if we do not obey by our own free will our enemy the devil, this cunning one will in no way be able to place in us any kind of evil.

Now, before the law and the coming of Christ, without the aid of those means of which we have spoken, many and very many pleased God and manifested themselves as irreproachable; among their number the righteous Enoch was honored by God by being translated, and Elijah was raised to heaven in a fiery chariot. Therefore, what kind of justification can we give, if after the manifestation of grace, after such and so great benefactions, after the annihilation of death and sin, we do not manifest ourselves as holy; if after being regenerated by the holy Baptism which we have received, standing under the protection of the holy angels by whom we are surrounded, and under the action of the grace of the Holy Spirit which we have been vouchsafed to receive — we do not become even like those who were before grace, that is, before Christ, but we remain in carelessness, and disdain and transgress the commandments of God?

And that we, if we are careless about our salvation, will be punished more than those who sinned before Christ, the Apostle Paul indicates when he says: *If the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation* (Hebrews 2:2-3).

And thus, each one of us, no matter what transgression he might have fallen into — let him not accuse Adam, but let him reproach himself. And let him show true and worthy repentance like Adam, if he desires to be vouchsafed the Kingdom of Heaven. Amen.

THE SOUL AFTER DEATH

A NOTE ON "REINCARNATION"

Among the occult ideas which are now being widely discussed and sometimes accepted by those who have "out-of-body" and "after-death" experiences, and even by some scientists, is the idea of reincarnation: that the soul after death does not undergo the Particular Judgment and then dwell in heaven or hell awaiting the resurrection of the body and the Last Judgment, but (evidently after a longer or shorter stay on the "astral plane") comes back to earth and occupies a new body, whether of a beast or of another man.

This idea was widespread in pagan antiquity in the West, before it was replaced by Christian ideas; but its spread today is largely owing to the influence of Hinduism and Buddhism, where it is commonly accepted. Today the idea is usually "humanized," in that people assume their "previous lives" were as men, whereas the more common idea both among Hindus and Buddhists and among ancient Greeks and Romans is that it is rather rare to achieve "incarnation" as a man, and that most of today's "incarnations" are as beasts, insects, and even plants.

Those who believe in this idea say that it accounts for all of the many "injustices" of earthly life, as well as for seemingly unexplainable phobias: if one is born blind, or in conditions of poverty, it is as a just reward for one's actions in a "previous life" (or, as Hindus and Buddhists say, because of one's "bad karma"); if one is afraid of water, it is because one drowned in a "previous existence."

Believers in reincarnation do not have any very thorough philosophy of the origin and destination of the soul, nor any convincing proofs to support their theory; its main attractions are the superficial ones of seeming to provide "justice" on earth, of explaining some psychic mysteries, and of providing some semblance of "immortality" for those who do not accept this on Christian grounds.

On deeper reflection, however, the theory of reincarnation offers no real explanation of injustices at all: if one suffers in this life for sins and mistakes in another lifetime which one cannot remember, and for which (if one was "previously" a beast) one cannot even be held responsible, and if (according to Buddhist teaching) there is even no "self" that survives from one "incarnation" to the next, and one's past mistakes were literally someone else's — then there is no recognizable justice at all, but only a blind suffering of evils whose origin is not to be traced out. The Christian teaching of the fall of Adam, which is the origin of all the world's evils, offers a much better explanation of injustices in the world; and the Christian revelation of God's perfect justice in His judgment of men for eternal life in heaven or hell renders unnecessary and trivial the idea of attaining "justice" through successive "incarnations" in this world.

In recent decades the idea of reincarnation has achieved a remarkable popularity in the Western world, and there have been numerous cases suggesting the "rememberance" of "past lives"; many people also return from "out-of-body" experiences believing that these experiences suggest or instill the idea of reincarnation. What are we to think of these cases?

Very few of these cases, it should be noted, offer "proof" that is any more than vaguely circumstantial, and could easily be the product of simple imagination: a child is born with a mark on his neck, and subsequently "remembers" that he was hanged as a horse thief in a "previous life"; a person fears heights, and then "remembers" that he died by falling in his "past life"; and the like. The natural human tendency

of fantasy renders such cases useless as "proof" of reincarnation.

In many cases, however, such "previous lives" have been discovered by a hypnotic technique known as "regressive hypnosis," which has in many cases given striking results in the recall of events long forgotten by the conscious mind, even as far back as infancy. The hypnotist brings a person "back" to infancy, and then asks: "What about *before that?*" Often, in such cases, a person will "remember" his "death" or even a whole different lifetime; what are we to think of such memories?

Well-trained hypnotists themselves will admit the pitfalls of "regressive hypnosis." Dr. Arthur C. Hastings, a California specialist in the psychology of communication, notes that "the most obvious thing that happens under hypnosis is that the person is extremely open to any subtle, unconscious, nonverbal, as well as verbal suggestions of the hypnotist and they are extremely compliant. If you ask them to go to a past life, and they don't *have* a past life, they will invent one for you! If you suggest that they saw a UFO, they would have seen a UFO* A Chicago-based hypnotist, Dr. Larry Garrett, who has done some 500 hypnotic regressions himself, notes that these regressions are often inaccurate even when it is only a matter of remembering a past event in *this* life: "A lot of times people fabricate things, from either wishful thinking, fantasies, dreams, things such as this . . . Anyone who is into hypnosis and does any type of regression would find out that many times people have such a vivid imagination that they will sit there and make up all kinds of things just to please the hypnotist" (*The Edge of Reality,* pp. 91-92).

Another researcher on this question writes: "This method is fraught with hazards, chief of which is the unconscious mind's tendency toward dramatic fantasy. What comes out in hypnosis may be, in effect, a dream of the kind of previous existence the subject would like to have lived or believes, correctly or incorrectly, that he did live . . . One

* J. Allen Hynek and Jacques Vallee, *The Edge of Reality,* Henry Regnery Co., Chicago, 1975, p. 107.

psychologist instructed a number of hypnotized subjects to remember a previous existence, and they did, without exception. Some of these accounts were replete with colorful details and seemed convincing . . . However, when the psychologist rehypnotized them they were able, in trance, to trace every element in the accounts of previous existence to some normal source—a person they had known in childhood, scenes from novels they had read or movies they had seen years before, and so on."**

But what of those cases, publicized widely of late, when there is "objective proof" of one's "previous life"—when a person "remembers" details of time and places he could not possibly have known by himself, and which can be checked by historical documents?

Such cases seem very convincing to those already inclined to believe in reincarnation; but this kind of "proof" is not different from the standard information provided by the "spirits" at seances (which can also be of a very striking kind), and there is no reason to suppose that the source is different. If the "spirits" at seances are quite clearly demons, then the information on one's "previous lives" can also be supplied by demons. The aim in both cases is the same: to confuse men with a dazzling display of seemingly "supernatural" knowledge, and thus to deceive them concerning the true nature of life after death and leave them spiritually unprepared for it.

Even occultists who are favorable in general to the idea of reincarnation admit that the "proof" for reincarnation can be interpreted in various ways. One American popularizer of occult ideas believes that "most reported instances giving evidence of reincarnation could possibly be cases of possession."* "Possession," according to such occultists, occurs when a "dead" person takes possession of a living body and the latter's personality and very identity seem to change, thus causing the impression that one is being

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** Allen Spraggett, *The Case for Immortality,* New American Library, New York, 1974, pp. 137-8.

* Suzy Smith, *Life is Forever,* G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1974, p. 171.

dominated by the characteristics of one's "previous life." Those beings that "possess" men, of course, are demons, no matter how much they may masquerade as the souls of the dead. The recent famous *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation* by Dr. Ian Stevenson seems, indeed, to be a collection of cases of such "possession."

The early Christian Church fought the idea of reincarnation, which entered the Christian world through Eastern teachings such as those of the Manicheans. Origen's false teaching of the "pre-existence of souls" was closely related to these teachings, and at the Fifth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in 553 it was strongly condemned and its followers anathematized. Many indivduial Fathers of the Church wrote against it, notably St. Ambrose of Milan in the West (*On Belief in the Resurrection,* Book II), St. Gregory of Nyssa in the East (*On the Soul and the Resurrection*), and others.

For the present-day Orthodox Christian who is tempted by this idea, or who wonders about the supposed "proof" of it, it is perhaps sufficient to reflect on three basic Christian dogmas which conclusively refute the very possibility of reincarnation:

1. *The resurrection of the body.* Christ rose from the dead in the very body which had died the death of all men, and became the first-fruits of all men, whose bodies will also be resurrected on the last day and rejoined to their souls in order to live eternally in heaven or hell, according to God's just judgment of their life on earth. This resurrected body, like that of Christ Himself, will be different from our earthly bodies in that it will be more refined and more like the angelic nature, without which it could not dwell in the Heavenly Kingdom, where there is no death or corruption; but it will still be the *same body,* miraculously restored and made fit by God for eternal life, as Ezekiel saw in his vision of the "dry bones" (Ezek. 37:1-14). In heaven the redeemed will recognize each other. The body is thus an inalienable part of the whole person who will live forever, and the idea of many bodies belonging to the same person

denies the very nature of the Heavenly Kingdom which God has prepared for those who love Him.

2. *Our redemption by Jesus Christ.* God took flesh and through His life, suffering, and death on the Cross redeemed us from the dominion of sin and death. Through His Church, we are saved and made fit for the Heavenly Kingdom, with no "penalty" to pay for our past transgressions. But according to the idea of reincarnation, if one is "saved" at all it is only after many lifetimes of working out the consequences of one's sins. This is the cold and dreary legalism of the pagan religions which was totally abolished by Christ's sacrifice on the Cross; the thief on His right hand received salvation in an instant through his faith in the Son of God, the "bad karma" of his evil deeds being obliterated by the grace of God.

3. *The Judgment. It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment* (Heb. 9:27). Human life is a single, definite period of trial, after which there is no "second chance," but only God's judgment (which is both just and merciful) of a man according to the state of his soul when this life is finished.

In these three doctrines the Christian revelation is quite precise and definite, in contrast to the pagan religions which do not believe either in the resurrection or in redemption, and are vague about judgment and the future life. The one answer to all supposed experiences or remembrances of "previous lifes" is precisely the clear-cut teaching of Christianity about the nature of human life and God's dealings with men.

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